

Resolve Conflict With 3 T'ai Chi Secrets

It seemed like an innocent little comment, but the other person took it totally the wrong way. Soon you're engaged in a full-blown argument. You're dead-set on defending what you said and proving the other person is making a big deal out of nothing.

Conflict like this is inevitable. We each live, at least to some degree, in our "own little worlds" and our worlds often collide—over issues small and large. T'ai Chi is an ancient art that teaches us how to resolve conflict gracefully while creating win-win solutions. In this article, we'll explore a three-step conflict resolution technique inspired by the principles of T'ai Chi.

T'ai Chi is based on the simple idea that life works best when you allow a free flow of energy within you and between yourself and others. In contrast, we get into conflicts when we rigidly hold onto thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that restrict the flow of energy and create tension within ourselves and with others. For example, it's an iron-clad rule that an argument will escalate when you hold onto the idea of "proving that you are right and the other person is wrong."

In contrast, in T'ai Chi you begin by letting go. This is the first step in the three-step conflict-resolution process:

1. **Let go of attachment to your point of view.** Your point of view got you into this mess in the first place, so a good place to begin is to let it go. Take a mental break from the point you're trying to make. In T'ai Chi, we let go by focusing into body sensations and consciously relaxing. An easy way to release tension is to shake out—your arms, your legs, and your whole body.

Now, sometimes you may struggle with letting go of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors because you think they somehow define you or make you "good or bad." However, your point of view is just one way of thinking and doing things—amongst many possibilities. It's neither right nor wrong. It's just a perspective on what is happening. Letting it go will open up better, more expansive and positive possibilities than hanging onto it.

2. **Return to your calm center.** Underneath the commotion of conflict is a Core part of you that is calm, clear, and connected to inner guidance. In T'ai Chi, we find a calm center in the lower abdomen and practice breathing from there. Taking a walk in nature or following a meditation technique are also great ways to relax into your Core and get free from the tangles of your little point of view. Once you've relaxed into that part of you that is beyond the ups and downs of everyday life, you can see things more clearly.

3. **Engage the other person with the intent to create a win-win solution.** Having been refreshed by visiting your calm center, come back to the other person with a desire to hear their point of view. This opens the possibility of a mutual agreement that respects you both and gives you both what you need. In T'ai Chi, we practice "push-hands," which is a way to sense the energy of another person and relate to them in a non-aggressive, cooperative way.

Now, you may be surprised to discover how quickly someone else will let down their guard when you come to them non-aggressively and sincerely seek to understand their point of view. Once the other person feels heard, they are much more likely to listen to you as well. In that context, it's so much easier to find mutually-agreeable, win-win solutions.

I encourage you to practice the above three steps to grow your skill at resolving conflict and getting to those win-win solutions. Like any skill, you'll get better and better at this the more you do it.